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UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE & MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS OF SHORT & LONG STAY WILDERNESS EXPERIENCES

Dr. Joseph Roggenbuck

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A Hermeneutic Approach to Studying the Nature of Wilderness Experiences

Draft Paper

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Running Head: Hermeneutics

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A persistent goal in natural resource-based leisure research has been to interpret and describe the relationship between wildland recreationists and the resources they use. One major focus of research addressing this goal has centered on attempts to identify the relationship between setting characteristics (broadly defined to include physical, social, and managerial dimensions) and the nature of leisure experiences available in that setting. In recognition of the fact that wildland recreationists seek a diverse array of experiences, from a management standpoint, this research has been linked to the goal of ensuring diversity in recreation opportunities available on public lands. For example, the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) Planning System (Driver et al. 1987) is one effort to link research on the relationship between setting/experience characteristics with the managerial goal of ensuring diversity in opportunities.

ROS has been widely adopted by both the US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management as a guide for classifying, and managing recreation opportunities on their lands. However, those who developed ROS clearly emphasize that this framework "serves only as a macro guide .... [and that] through site and project planning, additional diversity can be provided.... Because the ROS system can be oriented to regional planning of vastly different types of settings, any guidelines for its implementation will provide only general directions" (Driver et al. 1987:206). In other words, even when the ROS planning framework is applied, additional site (context) specific research and planning is required to achieve a desirable level of diversity in opportunity.

The purpose of this paper is to present an approach for developing a more site specific understanding of the diversity and nature of experiences recreationists receive in a given area. The research described in this paper was conducted at the Juniper Prairie Wilderness Area on the Ocala National Forest in Florida at the request of the US Forest Service. In particular, the Forest Service was concerned with the question of whether or not visitors were receiving a wilderness experience at Juniper Prairie. Wilderness is a state of mind (Nash, 1982) and whether a particular experience

constitutes a wilderness experience is a highly subjective judgment. For any given individual experience, there may be several opinions about the extent to which it represented a wilderness experience: the visitor may have one view, the researcher another, and the manager a third. In light of this perspective, the question of whether or not the experiences visitors find at Juniper Prairie constitute a wilderness experience is viewed as being a management decision. As a consequence, the research presented here adopted the more general goal of describing the nature of the experiences visitors find at Juniper Prairie in such a way that managers could begin to make a judgment about the extent to which these experiences represent wilderness experiences.

The research approach used in this study was grounded in the normative commitments of a hermeneutic paradigm (cf. Patterson and Williams, in review). A secondary purpose of this paper is to present an exemplar (Mishler, 1992) of research conducted in accordance with the normative commitments of hermeneutics. The first section of the paper outlines the assumptions about the nature of recreation experiences which guided the selection of this paradigm as the basis for the research. The second section briefly outlines some of the basic tenets of hermeneutics. The final two sections present the methodology and results.

Understanding the Nature of Experience

The most prevalent approach to understanding recreation in resource management has been a motivational research program that defines recreation as an intrinsically rewarding experience (Driver and Tocher, 1970; Driver et al. 1987). However, rather than looking directly at the nature of the experience, this approach defines recreational engagements in terms of "a package of specific psychological outcomes which are realized from a recreation engagement" (Manfredo et al., 1983:264). Thus, this approach looks at expectations, goals, desired outcomes, motivations, and cognitive judgments about outcomes actually received (Mannell and Iso-Ahola, 1987; Williams, 1989). As a result, the focus of this approach has been on satisfaction with the experience defined in

terms of the degree to which desired and expected outcomes are realized (Brown, 1989; Williams, 1989) rather than on the actual nature of the experience. This focus, though useful, also has limitations. First, for example, while the motivational approach may tell us that people visit parks to enjoy nature, this approach does not explore what it means to "enjoy nature" (i.e., the content of what is enjoyed, the process through which people attend to and perceive nature, or the emotional responses). Second, in many cases, especially for first time users, expectations are often vague or nonexistent (Arnould and Price, 1993). Third, experiences often have an emergent quality. That is, experiences may differ from expectations and the most memorable or enjoyable aspect of the experience may, in fact, be the unexpected (Arnould and Price, 1993; Scherl, 1988; Rolston 1987). And finally, a person with inappropriate expectations may receive the type of experience that management hopes to provide but be very dissatisfied or unhappy with it.

As a result of the concerns listed above, the research project adopted an alternative approach. In fact, the overall project adopted two alternative approaches. The first approach explored the nature of experience using an experience sampling method that captured the content and focus of attention at various moments during the course of the trip. This approach reflects a concern that memory decay or recall bias is the most serious threat to the validity of research exploring recreation experiences, and reflects the assumption that the nature of experience is best understood by exploring it as it unfolds.

In contrast, rather than documenting attention as the trip unfolds, the second research approach, presented in this paper, focuses on the meaning of the experience; that is, how the experience is constructed and remembered (in this case at its immediate conclusion - the take out point). This second approach reflects two major assumptions. The first assumption is that experience is best understood as a whole rather than as the sum of its parts. This statement should not be interpreted as a criticism of, or as being in conflict with, the research strategy adopted in the

companion research initiative. Rather, the two research strategies adopted in this instance are most appropriately thought of as approaching the nature of experience from different perspectives. The approach adopted in this phase of the research emphasizes the concept of "meaning" as a basis for understanding experience rather than the concept of "focus of attention" which is the basis for the first research strategy.

The second major assumption underlying this phase of the study reflects the belief that the specific nature of recreation experiences in natural environments is best characterized or described by the concept of situated freedom. Situated freedom is the idea that there is structure in the environment that sets boundaries on what can be perceived or experienced, but that within those boundaries recreationists are free to experience the world in highly individual, unique, and variable ways. Under these conditions, the nature of experience is seen as emergent rather than predictable. This concept is illustrated by the old woman/young woman drawing in Figure 1. In this example there is structure which sets boundaries on what it is reasonable to perceive in the picture. At the same time whether an individual seeing the drawing for the first time perceives the old woman or young woman is not really a predictable phenomenon. Both exist, either may be seen, and the same individual at different times may perceive one or the other. Eventually, individuals will learn to readily see either the old woman or young woman (though not both at the same time) depending on how they look at the drawing, but this reflects the simplicity of the illustration in contrast to the complexities of real world environments.

Under the two assumptions outlined above, the goal of research exploring the nature of experiences can be thought of as one of identifying the boundaries of the environment and the types of experiences that visitors are obtaining within those boundaries. This can be done at various levels of abstraction (specificity). For example at a very broad level one may identify that individuals visiting Juniper Prairie "experience challenge and excitement" or "enjoy nature", both of which, on

the surface, seem consistent with a wilderness experience. However, it is easy to imagine how both a visitor canoeing down Juniper Prairie and one taking a water chute log ride at Disney World find challenge and excitement. However, the definition of what challenge and excitement mean and the manner in which these opportunities are related to the setting is likely to differ vastly for the two types of experiences. Similarly, one person can enjoy nature by watching panhandling bears along motorized nature trails while another observes grizzlies as they congregate along rivers in remote areas of Alaska during a salmon run. While both individuals may respond that "enjoying nature" was an important aspect of the experience, the actual nature, meaning, and consequences of the experience are likely to be more appropriately described in vastly different language. As a result, to provide a basis for managers to reach a decision regarding whether visitors are able to find a wilderness experience at Juniper Prairie, greater specificity is needed.

Employing traditional survey techniques based on visitor responses to a set of written statements becomes problematic at levels of specificity greater than simply identifying that visitors "enjoyed nature." In part this is because many traditional psychometric measurement techniques used to establish the reliability, validity, and statistical generalizability of responses are partly designed to eliminate specificity or uniqueness in items used to measure responses. Also, the whole idea of representing the possible nature of the experience in some predetermined operational model becomes problematic when one adopts a perspective on human experience consistent with the concept of situated freedom. Therefore, rather than starting with an operational model, the starting point for the analysis of experience in the research reported here was to obtain recreationists' descriptions of their experience through open-ended interviews.

Normative Paradigm - Hermeneutics

Since Thomas Kuhn's (1962) discussion of scientific revolutions, philosophers of science have defined the appropriate unit of analysis for exploring a research tradition as its macrostructure

(Anderson, 1986). This macrostructure is composed of normative philosophical commitments that guide the practice of science (e.g., define what is knowable, prescribe how methodology is applied, establish criteria used in peer review processes, etc.). Different paradigms or approaches to science are characterized by differences in these philosophical commitments. Critical pluralism and other postpositivist perspectives in the philosophy of science emphasize the importance of seeking a fit between a researcher's perspective on the phenomenon being studied and the normative assumptions of the research paradigm one uses to explore the phenomenon (Anderson, 1986; Hunt, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1983). Additionally, to establish an adequate peer review process in the spirit of critical pluralism it is increasingly important for researchers to make their paradigmatic commitments explicit. The normative commitments of hermeneutics are described in detail in Patterson and Williams (in review) but are briefly outlined below.

Selection of hermeneutics as the normative paradigm underlying the research program described in this paper reflects the following philosophical commitments:

1. Attempts to understand the realm of meaning underlying human action are more like interpreting texts than like gaining knowledge of objects in nature (Polkinghorne, 1988; Olson, 1986);

2. Because human experience is mutually defined (co-constituted) by the transactional relationships among settings, individuals with unique identities, and situational influences, experience is more appropriately viewed as an emergent narrative rather than as predictable outcomes resulting from the causal interaction of antecedent elements;

3. Interview narratives provide one basis for "a direct interpretation of a complex unit of social interaction, in comparison to the standard [research] approach where such inferences are based on decontextualized bits and pieces" (Mishler, 1986b:241).

Study Area

Juniper Prairie is a 13,260 acre wilderness area in the Ocala National Forest in Florida. It offers a seven mile canoe trip down Juniper Run which starts at a concessionaire run campground/picnic area and ends at a small take out just outside of the wilderness area. The

concessionaire rents canoes and provides a shuttle service which returns visitors to the put-in. Private boaters are also allowed to canoe the Run.

Methodology

Within hermeneutics, methodological procedures are an emergent characteristic of the research, dependent on the questions being asked, the phenomenon being studied, and the understanding of the phenomenon which initially guides research. Hermeneutic research entails two components: data production and data analysis. In the present study, data were collected using open-ended interviews with respondents at the canoe landing at the end of Juniper Run. Interviews were necessarily short (10-20 minutes) because visitors were interviewed between the time they finished their trips and the arrival of an concessionaire's shuttle van which took them back to the put-in. Thirty interviews were conducted, tape recorded, and transcribed verbatim.

Hermeneutic Interviews. Hermeneutics reflects a constructivist ontology in which knowledge of phenomena and reality is viewed as a textually produced construction of the interviewer and interviewee (Howard, 1991). From this perspective, the researcher must adopt the role of "self as instrument", participating in an emergent discourse. Although some discussions of survey methodology make a distinction between structured and unstructured interviews, Ely et al. (1991) point out that all interviews have a structure. Differences between interviews are really a question of how the structure is negotiated. With respect to interviews using open-ended questions, two extremes are evident. The first extreme is represented by interviews in which all respondents are asked a standard set of questions in the same order and responses are taken as given with no additional probing. The other extreme is to begin with a single pre-planned question with subsequent questions driven by spontaneous reactions to the interviewees' responses. Hermeneutic interviews seek a balance between these two extremes. The role of the interviewer is to lead respondents to certain themes and to clarify ambiguities in responses without directing them to express specific meanings

(Kvale, 1983).

Initially, we approached this task by developing an interview guide (Table 1) composed of open-ended questions which were intended to lead respondents to discuss themes that were relevant to the research question without directing them to express specific meanings. However, during the course of the interviews, we began to realize the interview process was encouraging people to list the contents of their experiences (closer to measuring recall of how attention was focused) rather than to describe the nature and meaning of the experience. Analysis of the interviews as we were conducting them suggested that the most "successful" (informative, insightful) interviews were those in which the nature of the responses seemed closer to telling a story than to responding to interview questions. Additionally, observation of interactions among groups not interviewed supported this perception.

For example, consider the observations briefly summarizing the experience of the following two groups. The first was a family which arrived at the take out point in two canoes (parents in one and children in a second). They looked tired and unhappy and at first snapped at each other as they landed and disembarked from the canoe. They removed their gear and sat quietly saying very little, seemingly dejected, at first. However, after about 20 minutes they started discussing the experience with what appeared to be an increasing level of enthusiasm and animation. They talked about hearing "gators" calling to each other in the reeds. They discussed how one canoe lost track of the other, about how one group shouted to try and locate the missing canoe. They talked about having to decide whether to wait for the other canoe, whether they had taken the wrong turn, whether the other canoe would come that way at all, and whether they could find them or not. Meanwhile the other canoe had discovered the cabin near the boundary of the wilderness and had stopped to explore until they saw that it was not open to the public. The shuttle van arrived before they were finished discussing the experience. In a second example, a husband met his wife at the take out point. They had canoed the Run together a month before. This time he had done it with friends, and it had been an entirely

different experience. The previous trip had been smooth canoeing. This time the trip had been a real challenge, and that is what the story he told his wife focused on; how he had swamped and lost his glasses (later found) and about the times he had to get out of the canoe and lift it over obstacles simply to keep going. And even though this trip was not what he had expected, it seemed to make a good story, one he seemed to enjoy telling and appeared happy with.

The idea that people make sense of their world through story telling is consistent with "narrative psychology" a branch of psychology that is increasingly gaining attention among researchers seeking to understand the nature and meaning of human experiences. In recognizing this, subsequent interviews attempted to encourage people to tell the story of the experience rather than list the aspects of the experience.

Hermeneutic Analysis of Interviews. Hermeneutic analysis begins with in-depth exploration of individual interviews (idiographic level) to identify predominant themes through which narrative accounts of specific experiential situations can be meaningfully organized, interpreted, and presented. This involves: (1) establishing a point of view from which to begin analysis (the forestructure of understanding), (2) reading the entire narrative several times to gain an understanding of it in its entirety, (3) using this preliminary understanding as the basis for a deeper exploration of the "parts", and (4) modifying the understanding of the whole on the basis of the more detailed understanding of the parts. Subsequent to an idiographic analysis, a similar part-whole phase of analysis is used to develop a nomothetic (across individuals) analysis of data. In a nomothetic analysis the goal is to identify themes that are relevant beyond the unique experience of one individual.

Tesch (1990) describes this as developing an organizing system that can be used to help determine what individual statements reveal about the phenomenon being studied. The organizing system adopted in this analysis is based on an attempt to identify dominant themes which seem to characterize the nature of visitor experiences at Juniper Prairie and to present the different ways these

themes were featured in visitor experiences.

Sampling and Generalizability of Results. The 30 interviews were conducted over a period of 8 days in July and August (13 on the weekend and 17 on weekdays). Although an attempt was made to spread out the interviews and to select visitors with a wide range of characteristics, sampling was not random. As a consequence of the small sample size and the nonrandom sampling, the results presented here are not statistically generalizable. However, the concept of statistical generalizability is not entirely consistent with the assumptions about the nature of recreation experiences guiding this research approach. Statistical generalizability comes at a cost. As specificity (richness of detail, more concrete information, and less abstraction) increases generalizability decreases. For example, at some level of detail everyone's experience is unique. While at the highest level of abstraction, statements that are true of everyone can be made (e.g., during the trip visitors experienced nature). Since the goal of this research was to help managers determine if visitors are getting wilderness experiences at Juniper Prairie, richness of detail was sought at the expense of statistical generalizability.

The concept of situated freedom is also relevant to the discussion of generalizability. Again, situated freedom is the idea that there is structure in the environment that sets boundaries on the nature of experience but that within those boundaries recreationists are free to experience the world in highly individual, unique, and unpredictable ways. Under this perspective, the experiences collected, analyzed, and presented here may be thought of as representative types. The phrase "representative type" is used here to imply two concepts. First, it refers to the idea that the description of the experiences represent a detailed understanding of actual individuals rather than an aggregate characterization of some nonexisting average individual (cf. Shafer, 1969). Second, it is used to emphasize the idea that the data "represent" a possible type of experience in relation to the context of the setting rather a statistically generalizable, law-like result. In other words, the results describe

types of experiences that visitors are receiving at Juniper Prairie. However it is not appropriate to draw conclusions about the extent to which these types of experiences are distributed across the population of visitors to Juniper Prairie nor to assume that all possible types of experiences have been captured in the interviews.

RESULTS

At a nomothetic level, four coherent dimensions related to the question of whether or not visitors receive a wilderness experience at Juniper Prairie emerged. Three of these themes (Challenge, Closeness to Nature, Decisions Not Faced In Everyday Environments) are discussed in this paper.

Challenge. The most prevalent experiential dimension in the interviews was the experience of challenge. The role challenge played in defining the experience was classified into fairly distinct categories (Table 1). The organization of Table 1 represents our interpretation of the strength or degree to which the dimension of challenge seemed to dominate the experience, with intensity or importance seeming to decrease as one moves from left to right. At the extreme left, the theme of challenge seemed to define the meaning of the experience in the respondents' minds at the time of the interview. However, for the first group of respondents in this category (including members from three different groups), the challenge encountered led to unpleasant, dissatisfying experiences. Consider the following excerpts:

> F2: "When we were here 5 years ago, it was a lot easier than this time ... the trees have almost totally blocked the flow there." M: "That high and that quick makes it rough down there... " F2: ""About killed my back..... It will be a cold day before I come back. We lost a pair of shoes and nearly got pushed in the muck over our heads." (female, male, interview 72302[1]).

> M: [Visibly unhappy] "The first half of the river is really, the branches and the trees, something has to be done about that. But the second part of it is fine, it's really, it's ok." (70-74) It's just the overgrowth at the beginning. It's just, I think it's pretty bad. I don't

[1]The interview number represents month/day/interview number on that day.

> think you think it was bad [referring to one of 3 companions], but it's .... Because there are a lot of trees that have fallen down that are like right on top of the, right near the top of the water .... I don't know what you could possibly do about that, probably would have to send somebody down there cutting all day, but it'd be worth it." (male, interview 80905)

The three visitors expressing this attitude were all members of parties who participated in the interview as a group. One similarity among these respondents is that they did not actively participate through most of the interview, entering the conversation only long enough to express negative opinions.

In the second group of respondents for whom challenge seemed to define the experience, the meaning was a more positive one (Table 1). For these individuals, the challenge seemed to produce a sense of accomplishment, of overcoming or surviving a significant trial. The first two respondents in this category were quite similar in that they seemed to actively be debating in their minds whether the experience was, in fact, a positive one. For example, at the halfway point, one woman:

> "was hoping that there would be an option to get out and have someone pick you up there..... because you can start off thinking 7 miles is nothing, and then it seems very long." (female, interview 72103)

However, when asked about the meaning of the experience, she responded:

> "Well personally today it's just that I survived it and managed to go. Because truly if there had been a half way point where I could have gotten out then that's what I would have done. You know, just the idea of successfully completing it."

The second respondent in this category was quite similar. When asked if anything detracted from the experience the response was:

> "Just the difficulty of it. .... It was pretty harrowing. We got stuck in one spot. I let them off [referring to his two children]. I was going to lift the boat over and I slipped because it was a fresh tree that was down. It was all kind of mossy and what not. And it took me about 45 minutes to get the boat right side up, the water out, and pulled up on the side and bring it around the tree. These guys were pretty scared, but I guess that was part of the experience." (male, interview 72202).

However, when asked about whether anything stood out in his mind as adding to the experience, his

immediate and sole response was "the challenge." Additionally, he seemed further along in trying to decide whether or not the experience was a positive one. He seemed to feel it made a good story even as it ended; he began enthusiastically describing his experience even before the interviewer approached him.

A third respondent in this category found a similar meaning in the experience. For example, much of the interview focused on the skill and challenge it had taken to canoe the run and when asked the meaning of the experience his response was:

> "Well, it was a challenge that I wanted to do on my own and accomplishing it means a lot. It's an achievement if you will." (male, interview 80603)

However, unlike the previous two respondents, he did not seem to be mentally debating the appropriate evaluation of the experience or the positive contribution of challenge. In part this seemed to be because he had expected a challenge whereas the other respondents (one who been there before when experienced companions had done the paddling and one who had heard about it from a friend who "didn't give me any idea what it was all about") had not anticipated the degree of challenge. Interestingly, though this third respondent (80603) did seek reinforcement or verification that this was a challenging run: "From your perspective, is this a tough run, an easy run, or .... "

These three respondents shared two other similarities beyond the interpretation of the meaning of the experience. First, they were all novice canoers (one had been down the Run before, but with others doing the paddling). Second the aesthetic qualities of the place were not a major aspect of the interviews, suggesting, perhaps, that coping with the challenge had dominated the focus of attention ("No I didn't see much anything else. Not that I expected to, you're spending most of your time watching the water .... (male, interview 80603)).

The final respondent in this grouping, though similar in some ways (a novice who found the experience a challenge), also differed slightly. First she was a member of a large Sierra Club

excursion in which the interview with the entire group focused a great deal on the aesthetic qualities of the place. Second, the meaning and challenge were linked to a deeper life experience. When asked the meaning of the experience, she responded:

> "It meant a lot to me because I was in a very bad car accident in 1992 and this was my thing. I had to do this and I'm delighted." (female, interview 72304)

The second primary category concerning the role of challenge in the experience consisted of visitors for whom the challenge seemed to contribute to the construction of a good story (Table 1). The first grouping within this category was of individuals who initially suggested that the overhanging trees and submerged snags detracted from the experience, and usually suggested that something needed to be done about this. However their subsequent discussion indicated that this aspect of the Run in part made the experience what it was and provided a memorable story from the experience. The stories related by these respondents ranged from creative ducking, bending, and maneuvering of one's body within the canoe to actually tipping over as illustrated by the following two excerpts.

> M: "I just, I wondered. I've seen where they have cut some trees away and I just wonder if they couldn't get back out there. Some of them were really low. Almost impossible." G1: "Almost like doing the limbo in a canoe.... But some of it was fun though. I mean I like, I'd leave some of it in. But some were really rough." G2: "The ones that we went under, that last really, really low one. It had a branch hanging down like right in front of it and it was lower than the bridge. It was like, I don't know, wasn't that far off [hand gesture showing how far]." M: "We all sat in the bottom of the canoe and got below the gunnels. I mean we were as low as we could get." G1: "I mean we barely made it through." (male, two girls, interview 72101)

> I: "... was there anything in particular that detracted from .... your enjoyment of the trip." M: "Other than dumping out of the canoe?" F: [Laugh]. .... "No." M: "No it was fine." W: "Everything's wet. But it was good." .... I: "Anything in particular that added to the experience maybe?" F: "Falling in the water, yeah. That, that -" M: "That worked both ways." .... W: "And it was in a good, nice sandy spot and we could both touch, so we got the boat back over. But, looking at the boat and seeing it full of water was like, wow, what do you do now?" .... F: "When I went in that's what I thought [she would lose her glasses]. Though I held on to them." M: "Found out your paddles float." F: "They did? Yeah, they did [laugh]. I was too panicky - I'm in the water!" (male, female, interview 80604)

The second grouping within the "good story" category also emphasized capsizing and the challenge. In some cases these visitors capsized themselves, while in other cases they described observing others tip over. In the latter case, the possibility of tipping over themselves was definitely on their mind. The primary difference from the previous category was that this group seemed to have already decided that the overhangs and potential for swamping were a positive aspect of the experience whereas the previous group seemed to still be debating the issue in their minds. For example, when discussing what made the experience and place distinctive, one respondent who had not capsized said:

> "I have been canoeing on the eastern shore of Maryland ... I guess it's a lot wider, the river is a lot wider there. It just takes a lot more skill [here], which we didn't have... it was just real challenging. A few times we said, I don't know if we're going to do it, but I don't think it was a negative ...." (male, interview 80702)

While another who had capsized stated:

> F: "It looks natural, it doesn't look too made up for the public I don't think. Because they keep extra overhangs for, you know, the more natural kind of look." I: "So you're happy with the overhangs?" F: "Yeah, I think so because otherwise it would be too boring. It would be like some sort of Disneyland ride that you can't hurt yourself in anyway whatsoever. No hazard zones. It makes it more fun and exciting if there is more blockage somehow." (female, interview 80703)

The third grouping within the good story category was comprised of individuals for whom the challenge definitely led to a positive story. While one of these respondents had tipped in, there was, in general, less emphasis on tipping in than in the previous grouping. The following excerpts are representative of these respondents' comments.

> I: "A lot of folks find this a little bit challenging to them ...." W: [Laugh] "All the ones [overhangs] that you have to duck and stuff, there's a lot of ducking." M: "For beginners, it's not good for beginners." W: "There is a lot of ducking and stuff, but that makes it all the more fun I think .... If it was straight through, it wouldn't be the same." (female, male, interview 80605).

> M1: "Well it's totally different from Virginia because ... in Virginia we had the more rapid moving water, you know, and fighting going down the rocks and going over little ledges and

stuff like that where you don't have that in here. But here you're ducking trees and trying to make it around corners with tight turns..." I: "How was the ducking under trees, was that a problem? Did that detract from the experience?" M1: "Oh no. I don't even care about that, it's just fun.... Some of the places you go in are just pretty tight, you know, but who cares? You know, you didn't expect to be going down a main highway [laugh]." (male, interview 80804)

The final grouping within the good story category consisted of two interviews in which the respondents emphasized the opportunity Juniper Run provided for developing, using, and demonstrating their skill as canoeists.

M1: "... you have to learn how to read the current, like a downward V, and you have to learn the currents of the water." I: "Was that a good part of the experience or bad?" M1: "Learning? No, I liked it." M2: "I liked it, like a little adventure." M1: "I was anchor man on the bow." M2: "That's why I liked it a little bit. I mean it is, some of the ???? are all right, they're hard to get through. Just some of them are virtually impossible. We almost got tipped over and everything." (2 males, interview 72201)

I: "Is there anything about this particular river that you think makes it stand out, distinctive from the others? ...." F: "It's more tight." M: "What I like about it is it's more instinctive, yeah, I like -" F: "You've got to have more skill to maneuver it." M: "Yes, it's definitely, you need some skill which makes it different from the other rivers. I mean above average skill to maneuver it properly." (female, male, interview 80601)

The primary difference between this group and the "sense of accomplishment" grouping in the primary category "challenge defined the meaning of the experience" (Table 1) was that this group found the Run provided an opportunity to express an identity as experienced canoers and to display skills. They never doubted their ability to successfully complete the trip, whereas the "sense of accomplishment" group were novices and were, at times, uncertain of their ability to successfully complete the trip.

The third primary category with respect to the role of challenge in experiences at Juniper Run referred to interviews for which the theme was seen as a defining characteristic of the trip. There were two fairly distinct groupings within this category. The first included respondents with previous experience at the site who showed a strong attachment to place. The challenge of the Run contributed to that attachment.

M: "Definitely as far as being able to canoe, this is about the best around. Because you can go to Alexander, you know, and that's basically a river. It's big and ??? all the way down so if you want to get back into nature you're, here, in tight quarters. It's about the best place around." I: "So what makes this different from a river you're saying is it's -" M: "Oh yeah, it's like a big creek. I mean if you want to canoe this is the best place to go." (male, interview 72201)

I: "And why is it maybe your favorite over Alexander?" F: "Alexander is a wide stream of water, it's a wonderful spring and it's just a wide area. And lots of sunshine. I like the challenge, I like the crooked way and ... I like the challenge of these little meandering streams that we have coming out of Juniper. It's just my favorite. Probably my favorite in all of Florida." (female, interview 72304)

For these two individuals, the specific conditions of the day (e.g., the first respondent's assessment that today's trip had posed a higher than normal challenge) were less significant because they seemed to think in terms of an enduring involvement with the place rather than in terms of a single outing or experience.

For the second grouping within this primary category, the theme of challenge was raised as a definitive aspect of the experience, but respondents seemed somewhat ambivalent about its meaning to the experience.

".... just moving around the logs and everything, that was all right. It got to be a pain every once in a while, but outside of that it was all right." (male, interview 72301)

I: "Did that make it, are the trees making it more difficult to come down than it use to be?" M: "It use to be more a relaxing ride [laugh]. You know, you've got to duck a lot." I: "Has that taken away from the experience?" M: "No, no it's just got, you can't relax as much. You've got to keep your eyes forward. So it's just a different experience I would say." (male, interview 80803)

Thus, like other respondents, they recognized the challenge as a distinctive characteristic of this place, but generally it seemed as if they had not yet decided whether the challenge was a positive or negative aspect of the experience. For four of the respondents in this grouping who had canoed the Run previously (72203, 80602, 80803, and 80901) this was in part because the trip this time had been more difficult, more of a struggle than they remembered from previous visits.

The final primary category in Table 1 contains a miscellaneous grouping of responses in

which the theme of challenge was raised. However, for various reasons the role challenge played in defining the meaning of the experience was not clear. In two cases (80606, 80701) this seemed to be because the respondents seemed "suspicious of" or uncertain about the objective of the interview and therefore the interview was not able to get beyond the "public self" to the personal meaning of the experience. For example, the respondent in interview 80606 seemed suspicious, perhaps because he was an adult leader with a scout troop that had just arrived and were engaging in a playful brawl/mud fight in the water near the take out. As another example of situations in which interviews were placed in the miscellaneous category, in three interviews in this grouping (80801, 81001, 80903) the responses were somewhat contradictory. The run was described as an easy one, but to varying degrees the challenge of it was also pointed out (overhangs were a nuisance; it was not a big deal but they got caught in the brush and were sore after the work out; it was pretty "straight forward ... [but] there were some places along the river where you weren't sure which way to go").

Closeness to Nature. A second experiential dimension relevant to the question of whether or not visitors to Juniper Prairie are getting a wilderness experience is suggested by one of the respondent's answers to the question asking him to describe the area to someone who had not visited before:

> "I don't know, I'd just say it's worth the money and effort to get through if you like the outdoors. If you don't like the outdoors, don't do it." (male, interview 80802)

For many visitors, the experience provided an opportunity to get close to nature in a very literal sense. Table 2 presents the experiential themes relevant to this dimension. The first theme, closely related to (and not entirely distinct from) the dimension of challenge was closeness with nature afforded by the tight, winding stream strewn with blown down trees, snags, and overhangs. Over two-thirds of the respondents directly elaborated on this aspect of the experience:

> "... the first part of the trip there was an awful lot of overhangs. Which for the most part

isn't bothersome, but all of the sudden we really .... even if we had an option it was awful and we had these branches flying back at us.... In fact, a lot of people were yelling. I heard them in the background. They were just too low. If you weren't really careful you could have raked it right over your face." (male, interview 72102)

M: "Like I almost got rubbed off a couple of times. Look at my shoulders [showing brown steaks]. Owwww." I: "Yeah, I've noticed that some people come down here pretty marked up." M: "I'll tell you." (male, interview 80901)

"Yeah, with kind of thick foliage. It's tight. You're really going through some tight spots. It makes you feel like you're right in wilderness. I mean you are pretty much." (female, interview 80902)

The second most common aspect of this theme, expressed by more than one-third of the respondent's interviewed (Table 2), related to the presence of alligators along the Run. In addition to a thrill, encountering "gators" under the close quarters of the Run gave rise to some feelings of discomfort and trepidation.

M: "... a big gator." F: "Oh yeah, the thing just sat there like he owned the world. It was beautiful, but dangerous...." I: "So did ya'll stop and watch the gator...." F: "Not the gator, maybe the deer, but the gator, we took off." (male, female, interview 80602)

M: "It seems like the animals are closer to you. They're not as scared as they are - we go to Shenandoah National Park and you rarely see anything because there are so many people in there all the time and the animals are real scared. At least the birds and the alligators, they never moved. So that made it a little bit different." F: "They just look at you." I: "Was that good or bad, the alligators not moving?" M: "Oh, I thought that was good." F: "I didn't want them to move. I just wanted it to stay right where it was." (male, female, interview 80802)

M: "I thought seeing the alligators was pretty neat.... Actually it swam right under our bow. I thought that was pretty neat.... he looked 4 or 5 feet. Man we saw one that looked bigger a couple of minutes after that, but yeah, he was right under it." F: "About what, 8 feet from the boat?" M: "He acted a little belligerent. He didn't act afraid of us at all. He kind of came out to check it out. But the other one, that was neat, he went right under the boat.... I got to admit it did put ..." F: "It made him nervous [pointing to child]." M: "The one on the bank as we came by, you know, he came out towards us and stopped." F: "He didn't respect us too much." .... M: "Oh yeah, he was real close. Yeah, the one he was, these two didn't even see it, I did, went right under the boat and popped up on the other side. And yeah, I mean I wasn't nervous about it, but yeah, it does catch your attention. Want to make sure you don't flip at that point." (male, female, interview 80801)

In fact, given the "tightness" of the setting, even the thought of encountering alligators caused some

trepidation.

> M: "We didn't see any gators." I: "Was that a disappointment, were you sort of expecting -" M: "I thought we would see more wildlife." F: "When I saw how close the banks were, I was just as glad. That was like face to face with a gator. I wasn't ready for that." (male, female, interview 80604)

> I: "Did you see any alligators?" M: "Not an alligator.... It's just as well, we spilled our canoe one time and if they knew [his sons] there was alligators in there, there's no telling what my two would have done." (male, interview 81001)

Another opportunity to experience close contact with nature discussed by several respondents who had been among the first down the Run in the morning was encounters with spiders and spider webs that appear across the Run after the last trip of the preceding day.

> "Giant spiders. I've never seen giant spiders like that." F: "Oh yeah, the spiders." I: "Were they a positive or negative?" M: "Well there was no problem because we could see the web coming and usually we got most of them away. Or they were going over us and everyone went 'Urrrrrh.' A few screams, but other than that it was a lot of fun. It was very entertaining in that regard." (male, interview 72102)

> M: "And when you're first you get all the spider webs knocked down from the trail too." F: [Laugh]. "Yes." M: "So we learned that one too." (male, female, interview 80902)

Other types of bugs were also encountered in close quarters and considered part of the wilderness experience.

> M2: "All the bugs were exactly wilderness." M1: "Yeah, you need to bring ...., I meant to bring some skin so soft." (2 males, interview 72201)

> "... you have to go under limbs, where limbs are sticking out .... you know, ants coming off limbs, and stuff like that, on you." (male, interview 72301)

Thus, not only do visitors find a setting dominated by nature, many also found themselves in far more direct contact with nature than is typically found in opportunities provided by motorized nature trails or even many well-groomed hiking trails.

Decisions Not Faced in Everyday Environments. A final experiential dimension, already illustrated in the observation of the family whose canoes were separated during the trip, deals with

decisions that are not faced in everyday environments. Although not as prevalent as the three previous experiential dimensions, this one was evident in some form in over 40% of the interviews (Table 3). The most common way this dimension was revealed in experiences was through the theme of wayfinding. Slightly more than 25% of the groups interviewed indicated that there were times when they were not certain what route to take. In one case this was a relatively minor issue, the best route to take through the obstacles. But in other cases, despite the presence of other users on the Run, some respondents briefly experienced the sensation of being lost, ultimately depending on their ability to read the current to find their way.

> "... as I said, the only thing that I would suggest is that they have a cursory inspection every so often of the overhangs for the depth. Because sometimes you have two ways to go and you are not sure what is the best way to go. Sometimes we made the right decision and sometimes we didn't and then we wind up with an awful lot of overhang." (male, interview 72102)

> I: "Have you been down on a canoe trip before?" G: "Yes. We got lost." I: "This time?" G: "No last time." (girl, interview 72303)

> "And now that I've thought about it there's a couple of places where I wasn't certain where the trail was and I was able to follow it because the current was pretty good. But there may be days that people might have some trouble finding their way. Again you balance that with the natural scenario and I .... it was kind of a challenge trying to find it and I obviously found it eventually, but if ... depending on the skill level of the people coming out, there could be some people get lost. I - you probably couldn't get lost too long back in there." (male, interview 80603)

> I: "Could you hear other folks on the river?" M: "No, not after we let them all get away from us." W: "It was like, are we going the right way? We're lost." [Both laugh] I: "So you weren't certain a couple of times where the...." W: "No we were just...." M: "Well you can't be certain, but if you watch where the water flows. W: "Yeah." M: "The water is all going to flow to the right spot, so if you follow the current you're going to end up where you belong." (male, female, interview 80604)

As the second excerpt in particular illustrates, for some individuals this was a memorable and lasting part of the story from the experience.

A closely related theme was the absence of markers. In these cases, visitors were not so much lost in space, but were losing instead their sense of time.

"Maybe 1 or 2 markers, at least let you know where the half way mark is. I had no idea, we were going and going. But that was good, that was part of the experience." (male, interview 72202)

M3: "It needs more markers, how far down you are." M1: "Yeah, because we don't like to bring watches, so maybe a time line. They tell us at the beginning maybe 4 hours .... an hour to go." (2 males, interview 80905)

The second most prevalent theme was a somewhat diverse collection of responses in which visitors were faced with the unknown (Table 3). While the specific topics raised in the comments ranged from tannins (72203, 72303) to potential lightening (80801, 80803), they seemed to share in common a slight tone of apprehension or concern.

"What I noticed this time, you can see the water's got that kind of rust color. And we noticed that almost right away. And that concerns me a little bit although I don't know what it is. Do you?" (male, interview 72203)

And for one individual these uncertainties of the trip led to one of the experience's broader meanings for him.

"Well, I got a lot more canoeing experience. And I realize I need to be a lot more prepared than I usually am when I go canoeing. We don't canoe really enough to have prepared like we should have. We should have prepared for rain and we should have prepared, you know, to tip over. And we should have prepared more for that. But that's what I learned today. Because we need to be more prepared when we take on something like this." (male, interview 80805)

The final theme within this dimension was related to the previous in that visitors were expressing some concern, in this case about being alone. The first was from a respondent who had never been to a natural area before who found the fact that there were other people on the Run "comforting in a way" (male, interview 72303). The second was an adult scout leader who seemed to want to avoid a solitude experience:

I: "Were there times when you were out there by yourself or did you feel...." M: "I was never in, I was not by myself. When I was by myself, I speeded up and I caught other canoers..." (male, interview 80606)

Conclusions

One reviewer of the larger project report attempted to draw conclusions from the study by

classifying the results according to broader and more abstract categories identified through previous research as important dimensions for understanding leisure experience (e.g., Berlyene's (196?) concept of novelty). While this certainly seems to be a legitimate interpretation which demonstrates consistency of results from this study with previous research, such abstraction is not consistent with the hermeneutic goals underlying this research. The purpose of hermeneutic research is not to develop a general theory capable of explaining many occurrences of a phenomenon nor is its goal one of confirming existing theory. Rather its goals are: (1) to understand the nature of a phenomenon (e.g., the nature of visitor experiences) within a specific context (Juniper Prairie) and (2) to develop a foundation or starting point to help approach or map the phenomenon in other contexts while still remaining open to the unique features within the new context (Bruner, 1982; Gadamer, 1975).

With respect to the first hermeneutic goal, classifying results into more abstract categories removes the rich, detail-specific description of the nature of experience which motivated the study in the first place. For example, consider the loss in information which occurs simply from saying that visitors experienced challenge on Juniper Run. While such information may be useful in generating broad scale and regional planning models like ROS, when it comes to developing more site-specific guidelines called for in ROS, we believe managers need and desire greater detail.

With respect to the second goal, the concept of narrative story telling which emerged during the course of the interviews seems to provide a promising starting point for producing, representing, and analyzing data on the nature of recreation experiences in the future. As noted previously, there is a branch of psychology which approaches its subject matter from this standpoint (e.g. Howard, 1991 (?); Mishler, 1986a). Additionally, there is a body of literature on the subject of "literary folklorisitcs" (cf. Huisingh, 1993; Stahl, 1991) that explores the meaning, use, and nature of personal narratives in our lives. We believe that this literature should be explored to help develop a basis for gaining a better understanding of the nature and meaning of experiences in specific settings.

A second issue that needs to be addressed concerns the instrumental criteria by which to evaluate the acceptability or legitimacy of a specific study. Within natural resource management, traditional paradigms that follow instrumental criteria characteristic of foundationalist epistemologies predominate. Within foundationalist epistemologies, antecedent methodological (and often quantitative) criteria (e.g., sampling techniques that ensure statistical generalizability, acceptable Cronbach's alpha, significant R-square of sufficient magnitude, etc.) serve as one of the most important normative bases for evaluating the merits of research (Patterson and Williams, in review). Similar nonquantitative criteria have been developed in some foundationalist interpretive paradigms (e.g., naturalistic inquiry's focus on peer audits, external reviewers, triangulation, etc.). In contrast, hermeneutics represents an antifoundationalist epistemology that focuses more on evaluations of the research product itself rather than its adherence to antecedent methodological criteria. Three proposed instrumental criteria for evaluating hermeneutic research are persuasiveness, insightfulness, and practical utility (Patterson and Williams, in review).

Persuasiveness deals with the question of whether or not "a reader, adopting the same view point as articulated by the researcher, can also see what the researcher saw, whether or not he [or she] agrees with it" (Giorgi, 1975:96). We have attempted to support the persuasiveness of our interpretations in two ways: (1) by documenting our interpretive themes with excerpts from interviews and (2) by defining appropriate boundaries within which results should be extrapolated (i.e., the concept of representative types in contrast to the concept of statistical generalizability). Ultimately though, the question of persuasiveness is a judgment each reader has to make.

The criterion of insightfulness has been defined as an "interpretation [that] allows the evaluator to see a set of qualitative data as a coherent pattern or gestalt" (Thompson, 199:28). The four nomothetic level dimensions of the experience and the discussion of the way they featured in various visitors' experiences in relation to setting characteristics represents the primary patterns that

were revealed through analysis of the interviews. However, a second insight also emerged. During the course of interviews and observations of visitors at the take out it became apparent that many groups use the period of waiting before the arrival of the shuttle van as an opportunity to reflect on and define both the nature and the meaning of the experience. Consider for example, the observations of the family described in the methodology section, the respondents in the "sense of accomplishment from challenge" category who seemed to be debating whether or not the experience had been a positive or negative one, and the observation that groups often used the opportunity to talk among themselves or with other groups about the experience they had just completed. In fact, many of those interviewed seemed quite eager to discuss the rather intense experience they had just received. Thus, the opportunity to reflect on, relive, and define the meaning of the experience at the take-out was an important phase of the experience for many of the visitors, especially for those for whom the experience appeared most intense.

The third criterion, practical utility refers whether or not the research "uncovers an answer to the concern motivating the inquiry" (Packer and Addison, 1989c:289). We believe the study provides a good foundation to help managers address the question of whether or not visitors receive a wilderness experience at Juniper Prairie. First of all, it describes in richer detail than a standard survey the specific nature of representative experiences. Second, in contrast to a study focusing on the concept of satisfaction, this approach allows managers to make judgements about the wilderness nature of experiences whether or not the visitors were satisfied in receiving a wilderness experience. Third, it provides managers a more informed basis for responding to complaints about the amount of overhangs.

Finally, the study provides useful information with respect to the social conditions. Prior to the study, managers seemed primarily concerned about overall use levels on the Run (an issue discussed in the larger project report, but not in this paper). However, our research raised a second

issue related to the social context. As described above, our observations suggest that opportunity for reflection at the take-out was an important phase of the experience for many visitors. However, the take out is on the far side of a bridge that separates the wilderness from another part of the Forest. This area was also used extensively as a swimming hole by local residents. Especially on the weekends the site was often characterized by loud music, dogs running loose, air boats revving up their engines, drinking, shouting, volley ball games in the Run, and similar activities. In short, the take-out, especially on the weekends, often was not at all conducive to quiet reflection. In fact, we believe that conditions at the take out have a far greater impact on the nature and quality of the experience than current use levels on the river and therefore deserves priority in management considerations.

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Figure 1. Old woman/young woman figure.

Table 1. Challenge as a dimension of the types of experiences the sample[1] of visitors interviewed at Juniper Prairie (July-August, 1994) received.

Challenge Defined Meaning of the Experience		Challenge Helped Make Experience a Good Story				Challenge Was a Defining Characteristic of Experience		Role of Challenge Unclear
Absolute Negative	Sense of Accomplish-ment	Negative/ Positive	Tipping Over	Positive	Skill	Positive Attachment	Ambivalence	Misc.
72102[2,3] 72302[3] 80905	72103 72202 72304[3] 80603	72101 72102[3] 72304[3] 80604	72303 80702 80703 81002	80605 80804 80805 80902	72201 80601	72302[3] 72304[3]	72203 72301 80602 80802 80803 80901	80606 80701 80801 80903 81001
Percent of Groups								
10.0	13.3	13.3	13.3	13.3	6.7	6.7	20.0	16.7
Percent of Respondents								
8.8	11.8	11.8	11.8	11.8	5.9	5.9	17.6	14.7
20.6		41.2				23.5		14.7

[1]Due to the nonrandom sample and small sample size (30 groups), results should be thought of in terms of representative types rather than as statistically generalizable results (see text for explanation).

[2]The third row presents interview identification numbers. Identification numbers are month/day/interview number on that day.

[3]Most of the interviews were done with several members of the group participating. In some cases perceptions between group members differed significantly. When this occurred, both responses were included in the analysis. As a result, total number of responses presented in the table (34) is different from number of interviews (30).

Table 2. Closeness to nature as a dimension of the types of experiences the sample of visitors interviewed at Juniper Prairie (July-August, 1994) received.

Overhangs	Alligators	Spiders	Bugs	Snakes
72101	72102	72101	72201	80902
72102	72303	72102	72301	
72103	72304	72303	72303	
72201	80601	80801	80902	
72202	80602	80802		
72301	80604	80902		
72302	80702			
72303	80801			
72304	80802			
80603	80804			
80604	81001			
80702				
80801				
80802				
80803				
80804				
80901				
80902				
80905				
81001				
81002				
Percent of Groups				
70.0	36.67	20.0	13.33	3.33

Table 3. Decisions not faced in everyday environments as a dimension of the types of experiences the sample of visitors interviewed at Juniper Prairie (July-August, 1994) received.

Way Finding	Markers	Facing the Unknown	Not Being Alone
72102 72201 72202 72303 80603 80604 80801 80805	72101 72202 80603 80905	72203 72303 80702 80801 80803 80805	72303 80606
Percent of Groups			
26.67	13.33	20.0	6.67